

## **Bike share company awash in 'red tape' - 10/16/2016**

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As city officials raise parking rates to fund transportation alternatives, a local bike share company waits to operate on city streets.

Entrepreneurs Sean Blaise and Mandy Evans purchased 25 Instabike bicycles last year after using the service with ease in Orlando, but government red tape has stopped the business from taking off in Key West, the couple said.

Instabike is a self-contained automated system that allows users to rent three-speed bikes on the company's website or through a cellphone app. Customers walk up to an available bike, select and pay for a designated rental period, ranging from an hour to a week. The customer then receives an individual PIN that will lock and unlock the bike for the duration of their rental period. During that time, the bike is not available for anyone else to rent. At the end of the rental period, the customer returns the bike to a nearby bike rack and it re-enters circulation.

The \$1,500 shaft-driven bikes feature a GPS device that tracks location, duration of use and calories burned and maps the routes riders take. The onboard computer is powered by pedaling and a small solar panel.

A February Code Compliance ruling prevents the company from operating on city bike racks until a franchise agreement can be reached. Storing the bikes on city racks and making business transactions using city property is against city code, ruled Special Magistrate Donald Yates.

Since the ruling, the Instabikes have been solely available from a rack at Ocean Key Resort. The couple is open to expanding to other private lots but haven't seen enough interest from businesses in the busiest areas of town, they said.

Meanwhile, no progress has been made on a franchise agreement in more than six months, Blaise said.

"You've just raised parking and one of the things (involved) was a bike share and I'm like wait a second, you're claiming you're going to use the money to pay for a bike share program when you have a program and won't allow it to operate," Blaise said. "How does that make any sense?"

The wait for approval of a pilot program is concerning, said Mayor Craig Cates.

"It's been six months. We're talking some bicycles in a parking spot and all we do is talk about traffic and raising parking to alleviate traffic down there

and then we've got opportunities like this and we just don't move forward and I'm concerned with that," Cates said. "I'm disappointed it's taken so long."

Commissioners Sam Kaufman, Margaret Romero and Jimmy Weekley have also expressed support of the business.

Blaise addressed the City Commission at the Oct. 5 meeting and was given several responses from different departments for the delay.

"Six months ago at least I told the bicycle coordinator (Chris Hamilton) to do a ... request for proposal in order to do this project," said City Attorney Shawn Smith. "When it first came into my office (I said) to do the proposal so it's out there for everybody to respond to. I can't answer why they want to do a master plan ahead of time."

The bicycle and pedestrian master plan — which is currently being bid out to consulting firms — is a long-term project and the city is still exploring various options, leading to the delays with Instabike and other proposals, Planning Director Thaddeus Cohen said.

Another roadblock is that Instabike is classified as a bike rental business and not a bike share — which operate by monthly memberships — which is similar to the difference between car share programs and rental car companies, Cohen said.

"There's a difference between a bike share program, which is part of a transportation network, and a rental system," he said.

The company originally offered a \$25 monthly membership for locals but stopped the promotion because of the lack of available racks, Blaise said.

"Most of the community is supportive of our system, the mayor, too. For some reason, Planning, they want to wait until their master plan is completed, which will be 2018 or later, before they make any decision on us," Blaise said. "I have racks sitting behind my house; why can't we operate a pilot program?"

Because of operating interest from other companies, an RFP is needed before a pilot program can be approved, according to City Manager Jim Scholl and Cohen.

"We're trying to determine ... through an RFP, how we can structure it so that all the various vendors who are out there who have different levels of performance can provide it as well as provide the insurance, et cetera," Cohen said. "And that's what we've been working our way through."

“He’s not the only one who has asked about how we can do this,” Cohen said. “We talked to a group called Zagster out of Boston, who are in various cities around the country, before I met (Blaise). I’ve been talking to (Zagster) for a year and a half about how we can do this here.”

Zagster Communications Manager John Terbush said his company has only had preliminary discussions with Key West officials.

“It’s all very preliminary right now,” Terbush said. “There’s no serious discussions at this point.”

Blaise and Evans welcome other companies to compete if it moves the process forward, they said.

“I’ve told them multiple times, I don’t want a monopoly on the town and what scares me a little about this bid process, is it seems like it’s going to create another monopoly,” Blaise said. “I’d rather go out of business because someone else’s product is better. (If) another bike share system comes in and parks next to me and people prefer that system, then I’ll go out of business the right way. But to go out of business smothered in red tape is absurd.”

“They keep saying other companies are interested, where are they? They’re not here. We’ve been here for a year. The easiest thing for the city to do is just designate five racks, paint them blue or whatever and just say these are bike share racks. If another company wants to come into town and operate, fine,” he said.

Bike and car share programs are part of the changing culture of technology and allowing the pilot program would assist city staff in making the transportation master plan, Cates said.

“Until we work out all the details (of the master plan) it would be good to see how it works with (Instabike) and we can incorporate that into some of the changes we’re going to make,” Cates said. “The future is less cars. That kind of stuff is changing the markets. The older people like myself don’t see that but the younger people, the millennials (do).”

Instabike technology would provide valuable insight for the master plan, Blaise said.

“You’re hiring a consultant to come into town and guess at stuff (while) our bikes track everything and they actually make a light show of which streets people are using so you can compile the data from a year and see the routes most often taken,” he said.

If given approval, there could be four additional racks ready for operation within two days, Blaise said.

An RFP for the pilot program is currently in the works, according to Scholl.

“I asked (staff) to accelerate that and get it done sooner,” Scholl said. “I don’t know when it will be done. I expect it to be pretty quick.”

“We’re going to have a proposal and an opportunity to go forward.”

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Roman Van Loon

# THE CITIZEN

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KEY WEST

The Florida Keys' Only Daily Newspaper, Est. 1876

Junior football homecoming, roundup — Page 1B



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## WEATHER



Michael Sanchez, fourth grade, Gerald Adams Elementary School

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## FLORIDA KEYS

### Victims in two crashes identified

The Florida Highway Patrol identified those killed and injured in two crashes on U.S. 1 Friday.

• In the crash at Mile Marker 87, the deceased victims were identified as Arlio Aguirre Proenza, 52, and passenger Gladys Perez, 52. A second passenger, Danish Arlio Aguirre Garcia, 31, remains in critical but stable condition after being airlifted to Ryder Trauma Center in Miami. All are from Miami Gardens.

• The motorcyclist airlifted with head injuries in a crash on the Seven Mile Bridge was identified as 52-year-old Lesley Lee Kelley of Key West. He was cited with careless driving after near-ending a truck driven by William Richard Rose, 25, of Hollywood, Florida.

• The boater who fell off a dinghy and died near the Boca Chica Bridge had not yet been identified by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as of Saturday.

## WORLD

### Deal reached to limit greenhouse gases

Nearly 200 nations have reached a deal, announced Saturday morning after all-night negotiations, to limit the use of greenhouse gases far more powerful than carbon dioxide in a major effort to fight climate change. The talks on hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, were called

## Screwworm taking toll on Big Pine

BY TIMOTHY O'HARA  
Key West Citizen

Several dozen local residents packed the small meeting room at Big Pine Key Park on Saturday to express their concerns and learn more about the screwworm infestation that is wiping out large numbers of Key deer and has claimed

the life of several pets. Monroe County Commissioner George Neugent, who represents Big Pine and No Name keys, hosted a meeting with state and federal departments of agriculture, national wildlife refuges managers and local veterinarian Dr. Doug Mader on Saturday morning to educate the public on what is being done to

eradicate screwworms in the Keys and how people can protect their pets.

Just minutes before the meeting started, Big Pine Key resident Lance Gates pleaded with refuge workers and department of agriculture representatives to come help a suffering Key deer lying underneath his stilted home that was infected with

screwworm.

The gruesome image of the screwworm maggots slowly eating away at the helpless Key deer clearly had an impact on Gates.

"The flies were driving him crazy," Gates said. "He wanted my help and I just tried to do everything I

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## NOT SO FAST

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Photos by ROB O'NEAL/The Citizen

Instabikes can be rented by the hour or by the day and the company wishes to put advertising on the bikes.

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Guadalupe de Lafuente opens the Instabike app on her iPhone at the Ocean Key Resort.

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### Political forum Monday focusing on key races

BY TIMOTHY O'HARA  
Key West Citizen

The Key West-based nonprofit group, Hometown, will hold its final political forum Monday prior to the Nov. 8 general election.

The forum will feature debates between candidates vying for the Florida Keys state House representative seat, U.S. House representative, Monroe County state attorney, the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District board seat that represents Key West and a Keys Energy Services board seat.

There will also be a four-person panel debate about whether Florida Keys Mosquito Control District should allow the private

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### Postal Service aims to thwart fraud scams

BY SCOTT UNGER  
Key West Citizen

Officials with the U.S. Postal Service stopped an elderly woman from mailing \$4,000 cash to an address in the Bronx last week under suspicion of a scam.

The 82-year-old said she was assisting a nonprofit organization in New York, but the scene was all too

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## Bike

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## Scams

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the woman became agitated with workers and she eventually left without sending the cash. Clemons placed a hold on all mail being sent to the address and filed a report with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Telemarketing and mail fraud scams are rampant and varying, but usually target the elderly, Clemons said. Calls demanding money for late tax payments or assistance for relatives in trouble are frequently seen, along with fake sweepstakes promotions and other scams that involve cashing fake checks or money orders with the promise of financial gain, he said.

"The biggest thing the public needs to look out for is those scam letters coming to your house ... saying you won this much money, you've been selected to receive \$5 million, please send us so much cash for processing fees," Clemons said. "That's the biggest scam going on right now."

Fake job offers are another avenue for scam artists, according to USPS Postmaster Larry Cowan.

"You'll apply for a certain job; mystery shopper is one of them. So they'll send you a couple fake money orders or checks and they'll have a person come in and try to cash the money order and send them half of it," said Cowan. "The bank is not going to cash it and we're not going to cash it."

Clerks at the office are taught how to identify fake checks and money orders and are always on the lookout for scam artists,

(\$1,000) threshold."

"Our people are so sharp, they're not going to let you cash it," Clemons said. "They are able to establish which is fake and which is real."

More than 1,000 suspects each year are arrested for fraud conducted via the mail. Approximately 60 percent of people aged 60 are victims of prize or sweepstakes fraud, with many more not reporting the scams because of the embarrassment of being taken advantage of, according to the Postal Inspection Service.

"Older people believe it here, they really believe they're going to get something," Clemons said. "If you send that money you're going to see nothing in return."

Anyone unsure about an offer should ask promoters for a call-back number to ensure authenticity and allow time to think about the offer, never give out credit card or bank numbers, resist high pressure sales tactics, and report any suspicious offer or unsatisfactory transactions to officials, according to the Inspection Service website.

Although they were able to stop the woman last week, little can be done in most cases, Cowan said.

"We're going to try to prevent them the best we can but at the end of the day if they still want to (send) it, we can't stop them," he said.

Residents should be extra alert during the holiday months, as scams pick up during this time of year, Cowan said.

"Scams will escalate, credit card fraud will escalate, everything."

"Pay attention to what you're receiving in the